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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000792

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA: MORE THAN JUST A NEWS CHANNEL

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- The Al Jazeera Network encompasses much more than the Arabic-language station for which it is most famous, and the network seeks to wield influence beyond its traditional audience in the Arab world.

-- This includes channels broadcasting sports, documentaries, and children's programming, as well as the English-language station that has been the focus of much of AJ's efforts over the past year.

-- Nevertheless, the Arabic service remains the network's most influential medium. For this reason, Embassy will be reporting systematically on AJ Arabic's approach to issues on which the USG wishes to influence Arab public opinion via regular cables analyzing trends in editorial policy, personnel changes and other developments within the network, as well as weekly summaries of Al Jazeera's broadcasts compiled by the Public Affairs Section and the Open Source Center's Doha bureau.

THE MANY ARMS OF AL JAZEERA

[1](#)1. (SBU) For all of the competition that has sprung up from channels like Al Arabiyah, Al Hurra, BBC Arabic and others, Al Jazeera is still considered the undisputed king of Arabic broadcast media in most of the Arab world. For that reason, Al Jazeera is a vital component to the USG's strategy in communicating with the Arab world.

[1](#)2. (SBU) While Al Jazeera's Arabic news channel is a well-known brand worldwide, most outside the region are not aware of the many other pieces of the Al Jazeera "empire," many of which also reach wide audiences. The following are brief descriptions of the other parts of the Al Jazeera Network.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Television

-- Al Jazeera English: Staffed primarily by Brits, the channel's broadcasts seem to be a mix between a documentary channel and a straightforward 24-hour news station. Unlike Al Jazeera Arabic, the English side has yet to find its niche. AJ Director General Wadah Khanfar is reportedly not pleased with its haphazard selection of news stories and wants it to focus on being a news channel that emphasizes the

voices of the "global south." The channel claims a large viewership in Africa and South Asia, but has no data to back up the claim. Al Jazeera English saw an exodus of disgruntled staff during 2008, and has made little progress in attaining what it describes as its biggest goal: entry into the U.S. market.

-- Al Jazeera Mubasher: Sort of an Arabic C-Span, this channel runs live and taped coverage of public events, including conferences and parliamentary sessions from the region. For example, it regularly airs sessions organized by regional think tanks like the Brookings Doha Center.

-- Al Jazeera Sports: This is comprised of two channels, which are reportedly Al Jazeera's money makers, since it requires subscriptions and attracts advertising dollars.

-- Al Jazeera Documentary: This channel runs popular documentaries purchased from European and U.S. sources such as the History Channel and National Geographic, with Arabic voice-overs produced by Al Jazeera. It has also begun producing original documentaries for itself and other networks.

-- Al Jazeera Children's: This channel is really an arm of the Qatar Foundation that uses the Al Jazeera brand and its broadcasting equipment to reach its audience. Al Jazeera has absolutely no editorial control, and it is the only part of the Al Jazeera Network not co-located on the Qatar Broadcasting compound. It is the only "edutainment" channel in the Middle East, and hews very closely to Sheikha Mozah's

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desire to increase quality educational options available to Arabs.

-- Al Jazeera Subsidiaries: Al Jazeera's Director General has said that he intends to launch subsidiaries in regional languages such as Turkish and Urdu, although no apparent steps have so far been taken in this regard. Al Jazeera's Chairman of the Board, Shaykh Hamad bin Thamer, was quoted in local media in early November as stating that "no new channels" were in the works.

14. (SBU) Internet/Mobile Phone

-- Al Jazeera.Net: Al Jazeera's Arabic website director claims that most of its visitors come from the United States, indicating that the site is not the first choice for news in the region. As Internet penetration grows in the region, however, its influence, particularly among young people, can be expected to grow.

-- Al Jazeera Mobile: A recent poll in Qatar revealed that a staggering 90 percent of respondents received news alerts on their mobile phones, and most of these users were relying on Al Jazeera Mobile, a service that is also available around the region.

15. (SBU) Print Media

-- Al Jazeera Newspaper: Plans have been underway for a regional newspaper for several years, and a chief editor remains on salary within Al Jazeera, but this project appears to be mothballed for the moment.

LeBaron